No. 93

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"No, I don't think I heard about that," she lied as she raised her arm and waved at a passing steamer. "It must have happened before I came."

R. of M. G., No. 93.

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MR. JACKSON questioned the guard concerning the speed of the train at Hedgemoor Junction. It seemed that the train had come into the station at unusual speed, so that it had had to be backed.

"Would you say," asked Mr. Jackson, "that a man could leave a train at such speed?"

"I shouldn't like to be positive, sir; a railway man might, but for most people it would be pretty risky," was the answer.

The evidence of the London tradesmen entirely supported Alice Mortimer, and their books, produced, corroborated the receipts found on her.

The notes offered by her in payment had been changed, as she alleged. She had dealt with most of these tradespeople for some months, and had been in the habit of herself coming to their shops.

After this evidence, Graham Ericsen was called. He excited an interest only second to Alice.

His personal appearance went far to produce this, for besides a handsome face and a stately presence, there was about him the sort of attraction no one can define though everyone feels it — an attraction which was apart from his youth, and would certainly outlive it.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Jackson apologetically, "I must ask you some painful questions."

Ericson bowed.

"May I ask how long you have been engaged to Miss Mortimer?"

"About five months."

"Did your uncle give you his reasons for objecting to the marriage?"

"He thought I should find it a mistake."

"Were you dependent on him?"

"I had no means but what he allowed me."

"Could you have married on these means?"

"No."

"And your uncle declined to increase them?"

"That is so."

"What sort of terms did this difference produce?"

"It made no change at all. Our terms were those of father and son."

"But if you could have afforded to marry, I suppose you would have done so?"

"In time, no doubt; but I should have tried persuasion first."

"Did Miss Mortimer acquiesce in this attitude of yours?"

"I think it vexed her sometimes. But I should like to add," said Ericsen, still more clearly than before, "that she is not very happy at home."

"You differed in opinion, then, on this point?"

"Scarcely that. Miss Mortimer quite understood my objections to oppose my uncle."

"Will you state the ground of those objections?"

"My uncle was in all essentials my father," said Ericsen quietly; "there was a very strong tie between us. He always told me I should be his heir, but no disregard of mine to his wishes would have induced him to rescind that intention."

"You were not actuated by a fear of disinheritance, then?"

"Not at all."

"Had you any reason to think your uncle would relent?"

"Not much reason," said Ericsen, with some reluctance. "I hoped, of course. Time was in my favor."

"You mean, of course, you were young enough to wait?"

"Yes."

He was asked by Mr. Lane his whereabouts on the day of the murder.

It appeared he had been at home all the morning, had spent the afternoon with a friend, and returned to his rooms to find the telegram from Harris.

The friend corroborated.

Ericsen was dismissed with the remark from the coroner that his evidence was perfectly satisfactory, and again the inquest was adjourned.

Early the next morning, without anyone but the persons immediately interested being aware of it, the murdered man was buried in the village churchyard.

Graham Ericsen was seen to place on the coffin two offerings of flowers — a cross and wreath, one of which was conjectured to come from Miss Mortimer.

When the court met again the police stated that they had no further clue to the supposed third passenger.

The stains on the knife had been analyzed, and proved to be those of blood, but whether it was human blood was open to doubt in the opinion of the expert engaged.

After this evidence a sensation occurred—a man rose up in the body of the court and asked to be heard.

He looked like a seafaring man. He said that, a month ago, when passing thorugh Earl's Monckton, he had lost, on some common ground near, a knife answering the description he had read in the papers of the weapon found on the line.

He had bought it in a South American port. The knife was shown him, and he identified it as his.

This looked like a clue, and everybody was on the tiptoe of expectation. The man gave his name as Fenwick; he had no fixed place of residence.

He seemed surprised when questions were put to him as to his whereabouts on the day of the murder. Some people thought he became a little confused!

He avowed he was in London on the day of the murder, and had come forward to claim his property; it was a rather peculiar knife, and he valued it.

This simplicity was possible in a seaman, but the story looked odd. If it were correct it intensified the theory that the murderer belonged to the neighborhood, and was then likely to know the habits of his victim.

Further questioning did not show it to be incorrect—that is to say, the man seemed ignorant both of the neighborhood and of old Mr. Ericson.

He declined, however, to state what had brought him to Earl's Monckton a month ago.

He was detained, much to his annoyance, for further inquiries, and told that his knife must remain in the custody of the police.

The inquiries did not elucidate the mystery. No local person was missing from the neighborhood, but at the same time Fenwick had not been seen about.

Nor was there any evidence that he had been in the same train as Mr. Ericsen, nor observed by any railway official at Earl's Monckton or the other stations en route from town.

Alice Mortimer failed to identify him, though she at first hesitated. This failure, however, was not conclusive, because confessedly she had not observed the third passenger.

Fenwick looked rather a vagrant — the sort of man who knocks about from one ship to the other, dismissed from some or dismissing himself; but there was nothing further against him, and no reason to regard him with suspicion. He was allowed to go.

The inquest dragged on for a week. At the end

of that time Mr. Lane made a telling speech on behalf of his client, Miss Mortimer, who was lying under a certain amount of suspicion.

He weighed all the evidence, and seized boldly and cleverly on the weakest point in it—the man unknown.

He claimed for his client an entire acquittal from the least taint of suspicion of so foul, so impossible a crime.

Then the coroner summed up, and the jury retired to consider their verdict.

Alice Mortimer, who had been calm and sustained through all these trying days, showed no sign of breakdown now the crucial moment had come.

Perhaps she had seen clearly, or had been enlightened by her advisers, how the evidence was tending.

She wore to-day a closer veil than usual, and even Ericsen, at her side, could not see distinctly any changes there might be in her face.

But she sat erect and steady and her hands lay quietly in her lap.

The jury returned a solemn verdict of murder against "some person or persons unknown," and the coroner recorded his agreement with such verdict.

He was especially glad, he said, to be able to pronounce Miss Alice Mortimer entirely clear of the suspicion that had rested on her, and sympathized deeply with her in the position in which she had been placed.

The police were exonerated from all blame, and after a long harangue, the coroner closed with the usual condolences with the friends of the murdered man.

But long before that end, Ericsen's whole attention had been taken up by Alice.

She was drawing her breath in gasps, and the hand he had taken quivered violently and uncontrollably.

But she resisted all efforts to take her away.

"I want to hear the end," she whispered.

"It is the end, dearest—all you need care for." he said.

But she drew her hand from his and sat more erect, determined to conquer.

There was applause as the coroner finished, and before Ericsen could begin to beg Alice to go, he found himself and her surrounded by sympathizing friends and neighbors.

And Alice had put back her veil, and, pale but lovely, was answering congratulations with grateful smiles. She took Ericsen by surprise.

He had not given her credit for such self-command; he almost wished she had had less, and he could have made her an excuse for escaping from the kindly notice.

He did get her away as soon as he could, into a small room leading from the dining room, which was fast emptying.

There he held the girl as if he never could loose her, with a smothered—

"My darling, my darling! Thank God it is all over!"

"Is it?" said Alice Mortimer tremblingly. "Will all the world acquit me?"

"Yes, yes, and if not—what then? You can live down all doubt—you and I together."

And then she lifted a radiant face, and Ericsen sealed the vow of faith and love with his lips on hers.

"I—I ought to be bowed in deepest sorrow," he told her a moment later as he held her at arms' length and gazed into her half-closed eyes. "Yes, I ought to be overwhelmed with sorrow, for in Uncle Arthur I lost the most true, the most generous and the best friend any

man ever had.

"But I am not," he continued in a lighter tone. "I will be frank enough to say that I am happy. For this tragedy, though horrible it is, has removed the barrier between us."

Alice Mortimer smiled.

"Ah," she breathed. "I am happy because you are happy. I love you, Graham—I love you more than you'll ever know."

"And I love you as long as my heart beats," he told her. "Nothing shall ever part us."

She gave him her lips.

"No—nothing," she said in an awed whisper.

Chapter 312

THE FIRST GLIMMER

BUT THERE was a world outside Earl's Monckton—a world that only knew the village and its people by name; and that world had no scruple in lifting up its voice and proclaiming that it was not entirely satisfied with the verdict in the mysterious murder case, and that the end was yet to come.

Keeping adroitly clear of libel, many newspapers, both London and provincial, called attention to discrepancies — said this thing and that thing had not been duly emphasized.

Enumerated questions that should have been asked and had been omitted; hinted at local interest at an undue disregard of a strong motive, and of the fact that though abnormal crimes were rare, they were not impossible.

Wanted to know more about the man unknown, his movements, his capacity for escaping the notice of officials whose duty it was to observe; where he had gone to, where he could possibly be.

It was strange that the police had no idea as to the identity of this third passenger, though if the knife sworn to by the man Fenwick was the one used by the murderer, that murderer was most likely acquainted with the neighborhood and its inhabitants.

The story told by Fenwick was also discussed.

Some said the police had shown stupidity in letting the man go so easily; that his presence in Earl's Monckton a month ago ought to be explained; that even

a seaman could not be so simple as to imagine that he would be allowed to retain his knife.

On the other hand, he would scarcely, were he really implicated, be so foolish as to run the risk of coming under police notice.

There were remarks, but so veiled as to make their meaning uncertain, about the drug administered, and the place where the knife was found—not exactly the spot one would have expected if, as was alleged, the murderer had left the train before arriving at the Junction.

Other papers, equally important, applauded the verdict, and congratulated the innocent sufferer.

The case had, in fact, created a sensation, and people who only knew of Graham Ericsen through the papers wondered what he would do, and even settled his future for him.

Would he marry a woman who was under a certain amount of shadow?

Would he wait until the talk had evaporated, or would he take the view of sheltering her with his name, and brave the accusation of being over hasty to take advantage of his uncle's death?

Would he, on the other hand, think that an early marriage would lend color to the innuendoes flying about, and that it was not advisable on that account?

Ericsen did not trouble himself about these censors, with their cut-and-dried conjectures.

He saw the slur cast on an innocent woman, and he saw that woman drooping and suffering, both physically and mentally, in a home the reverse of sympathetic.

Under other circumstances he would have delayed his marriage several months—anything else would be to him a want of decent respect, to say nothing of af-

fection.

But as things were, he reconsidered his position. Of course he saw the complexion that might be put on a speedy marriage.

But there was also another complexion — such proof of his absolute faith in Alice might go far to stifle the stupid gossip passing from lip to lip.

The only person to whom the young man spoke on the matter was his girl cousin, Marjorie Fairfax.

She had always been something of a confidante to him, and so far a second conscience, that he felt there must be a wrong or mistake in a course of action she did not approve.

In this case, though he had pretty well made up his mind, and did not seek advice, he was relieved and glad to find Marjorie in complete agreement with him.

"Annie isn't fond of Alice," he said, "and the poor child is miserable and frightened. So long as my friends —a few of them at least—don't misunderstand me, I care less than nothing for the world.

"Alice takes things to heart so, as you'll find out when you know her. And she hasn't the tough fibre or elastic physique, as you have, that cannot be beaten down."

"I'm so sorry for her," said the girl in her tenderest tones. "You know mother and I will do all for her we can. Would she come to us for a while? We are not really strangers, though she has scarcely seen us."

"That is just what I should like," said Ericsen; but would Aunt Cathie object?"

"Oh, no," said Marjorie, smiling; "of course not. We were talking it over. I am going down to Earl's Monckton soon and see Alice Mortimer about it."

"I'm going down this afternoon. Thank you, Marjorie. If Alice will consent, that will clear my way."

He found Alice alone, sitting by a half-dying fire. The atmosphere of the room felt chilly even to him, coming in from the fresh outer air.

She lifted heavy eyes as he entered, and rose very slowly with a transient smile. She seemed worse than he had seen her yet.

He took her in his arms and caressed her tenderly. She hardly responded.

"You shouldn't be here alone, in this cold room," said Ericsen; "you have nearly let the fire out."

"Have I?" said the girl listlessly. She sank again on her sofa and watched him putting the fire together. "I'd rather be alone—nobody wants me—nobody cares for me now."

"Nobody!" said Ericsen, sitting down by her. The fire had sprung up brightly and looked cheering. "That doesn't apply to me, of course, dearest. You mustn't shut yourself out from everyone."

"Annie never loved me," said Alice, in a choked voice.

"And I suppose I don't love you, as I get neither a smile nor even much of a welcome," said Ericsen, drawing her to him. "I have to take it."

"Oh, Graham!" She lifted her face to him. "But you don't mean it—you are smiling."

Ericsen pressed her close, with a passion born of his heartache and his anxiety; she seemed so frail, so unhappy.

"My own darling, I mean nothing but that I love you to the uttermost!" he said, kissing the red lips that gave him at last the smile he wanted. "You'd be happier away from this place and its associations."

"Yes—much happier," murmured Alice.

"I want you to go to Aunt Cathie and Marjorie, dearest; they have charged me to say how glad they will

be to have you and make you as happy as they can."

And having said this with the utmost gentleness, he was surprised when Alice pulled herself from him and buried her face in the sofa cushion.

"Oh, how unkind ou are!" she said, in smothered tones. "I can't go among strangers! They don't want me—they only ask me to please you! Let me alone—let me stay here! At least, I am hidden away!"

"My poor girl, that is sheer morbidness. Look up and listen to me, and let me explain——"

She sprang up and went to the other side of the hearth, and began crying hysterically.

"Nobody understands!" she sobbed, "not even you! Give it all up——"

"Give what up?" said Ericsen, who had followed her and attempted to take her hand.

She would not let him.

"You don't love me—you doubt me!" she went on, still crying. "I know I'm a burden! I'll go away and trouble nobody! You are tired of it—tired of me! You don't love me any longer!"

It sounded to him mere hysterical fancies, but that she had such fancies showed how overwrought she was.

She alarmed him.

"Alice, don't talk so—you don't know what you say!" he said. "Come, I won't let you turn from me. You shall do nothing that makes you unhappy."

He had got hold of a hand she scarcely seemed to know he had taken. He drew her gently towards him.

She was catching her breath hysterically, looking more lovely in her tears than most women can manage to look in smiles.

Ericsen folded her to him, she quivering with her sobs—sobs that went through him.

Well, he must give up his reluctance to even seem to take hasty advantage of his uncle's terrible death.

He must have her in his own hands—this bruised, tender flower of his.

"My own love!" he whispered.

"Yes—once—once!" she broke in.

"Once and always. There is the one way to make you happy—the only way I see now. Hush, dear! You are terribly upset! I only hesitated for your sake as well as out of reverence — because, after all that has passed, it might seem——

"But I must have you in my care." He felt her hold her breath, and said softly—"You will be happy with me—you will not put scruples in the way. I love you now as I always did. You don't believe all you said, surely."

Again she surprised him — lifted her head, and checked her tears, and said very sadly——

"No, Graham — I understand — but I should be only a weight on you to drag you down. People would say things about you. You must give it up."

She tried to put him from her.

Ericsen looked on this sudden resolve as a distressing phase of the morbidness that seemed to him to threaten her health.

He simply tightened his clasp of her, and smiled.

"That answer is like you, sweetheart; but I cannot possibly take it. I am afraid for you out of my hands—more afraid for you than of the world. The friends I love will not misjudge me—the friend who is gone perhaps sees clearer than he saw here. He, too, will understand. A quiet marriage away from here——"

"No, no!" she murmured; but it was a feeble protest. She had hidden her face, and her tears seemed stayed. Ericsen put his hand on her pretty head and

pressed it closer.

"I will manage it," he said, "and you will not oppose me?"

"Graham — you always conquer me!" she whispered, after a minute's pause.

He lifted her face and laid his lips on hers in a long kiss. There were drawbacks to this immediate marriage.

It could not be entered on with the unalloyed happiness he had dreamed of, but happiness there was, keen and deep—the deeper because his treasure needed care, and he could give it.

No one else could give it.

Alice was subdued, and said little while she sat by his side and listened to his plans; but, still, she had partly revived.

"I can't help feeling a little happier," she faltered, when he was leaving her.

He managed it all with the utmost quietness.

He was not of sufficient importance to have his movements chronicled, and no one knew anything about it until the announcement of the marriage in the "Times."

It took place at a seaside town.

There were no bridesmaids, and Alice wore her traveling dress, so as to be able to leave the church for the Boulogne boat.

She was even whiter than most brides, and rigidly composed, till the few good-byes were over, and the car was driven down to the pier.

Then Ericsen laid a half-trembling hand over the gold wedding-ring, and it must have been the movement that broke down the icy calmness.

She locked both her hands over his convulsively and there was piteous pleading in the dark eyes.

"It can't be undone!" she said, in a shaking voice. "Graham! Graham! are you glad? Say you are glad!"

"Darling — how glad! My own wife!" was his passionate, hurried answer, for the brief journey was almost over.

The glitter in her eyes changed to radiance; as she stepped from the car she as like a creature transformed from the pale, drooping girl of last month.

The past seemed to have rolled from her from that hour—love alone to hold her body and soul.

What man, finding himself the object of such absorbing devotion, could remember that there might have been a little more tenacity, and a little more sympathy with a grief she could not be expected to feel herself?

Ericsen was steeped in a glamor that hid all flaws in his jewel. Even that unshared grief deepened the glamor, for the shadow it threw made love more precious.

He smiled when she seemed jealous of even a memory that made him at times silent and unnoticing of her.

"You ought not to have a niche, a corner in your heart, I do not fill," she said, leaning on his knee, and speaking playfully, but her great eyes flashed.

"Would you have me forget so easily?" said Ericsen, rousing himself from his fit of depression.

"Forget?" she repeated. "But when one has love!"

"I don't understand, Alice."

"Don't you? You! Why I want nothing else but for you to love me! You have other thoughts — other needs."

"But they don't lessen love, dearest."

"They must! Look, you have sat in this room half-an-hour since I have been in it, and scarcely said a

word. You only looked up when I came in."

"You are very exacting," with a smile. "It's a matter of course to be glad when you are near me—it doesn't need constant saying."

"But that is so cold—I want so much!" said Alice with a restless movement. "One day you will tire of me, Graham—you will care for other things before me."

Her red lips were quivering and pouting. Ericsen, inclined at first to treat this new jealousy as only another phase of her pretty exactions, changed his intention, and lifted her face to him.

"You can't mean that, really," he said, with unconscious wistfulness. "You can surely trust in my love, without my wearying you with it every hour."

"You couldn't weary me," said the girl vehemently. "I want to be told of it every hour, every minute! I only live for you. You must live for me—always!"

Ericsen could not have explained why he put his lips to the girl's rather to silence them that as an assurance of faith.

There was a jar somewhere within him—vague, but painful. He said, half-soothingly——

"Hush, Alice! That is as if you did not quite trust me, and I should be most miserable to think that."

"Yes—yes—I trust you!" she murmured, sinking the eyes that had been gazing so passionately up into his.

He drew her face against his breast, with a something stirring in his heart that had never been there before, and held him silent.

Alice presently lifted her head sharply.

"What are you thinking of?" she said, searching his face.

A little taken aback, Ericsen answered at random——

"I don't know—never mind my thoughts. They weren't thoughts, exactly."

"Yes, but tell me. You mustn't have thoughts you keep to yourself. Were they about me—what I said?"

"Never mind them, Alice." He half put her from him. She, resisting, drew back to him clingingly.

"Graham, you brood over that murder," she said, "and then you recall what your uncle thought of me—and try to put me aside!"

"What do you mean?" said Ericsen, a little haughtily, and his tone decidedly hurt. "What has come over you to-day, Alice?"

The watchfulness in her eyes, the something slumbering there almost like anger, changed to piteous appeal.

"Don't be angry," she murmured. "Think how I love you—that it would kill me if you loved me less! Kiss me again! That other kiss—was hateful!"

A sort of thrill went through the man. Hateful! Why?

What had he meant by that kiss? What had she felt in it? Surely he had never been cruel to this sensitive creature who had suffered so much?

Remorseful, he wrapped the girl close; and yet, as she clung to him, there was a confused wonder in his mind as to what the little contretemps had sprung from—what it was all about. A fuss over nothing?

It passed from his sentient memory in the charm of the new life. It came back to him in other and not such distant days.

Alice had evinced an uneasiness which was too pronounced to escape Graham Ericsen's eyes. And he could not understand why she should deliberately bring up the subject of his uncle's murder.

He considered it most tactless because they were

on their honeymoon. He did not even want to think of the tragedy which had been directly responsible for bringing them together so soon.

Then something else happened which surprised him. When he suggested that they go to Italy and spend a few weeks in Venice, she vetoed the idea with unnecessary vehemence.

Graham Ericsen was beginning to get another view of his beautiful wife's character. She could be very obstinate.

And so their honeymoon trip was not the pleasant success he had hoped for. Just the same Alice wanted to remain abroad and would go any place except Italy or America—for a very good reason!

Chapter 313

"DO I LIKE HER?"

O I AM to see this wonderful Cousin Marjorie?" said Alice's sweet, seductive voice, and she looked at her husband with one of her brightest smiles. "I suppose I must get myself up very smartly."

She stood in a small but luxurious dressing-room in a West-end house.

The soft light of a spring evening glowed on very dainty draperies and delicately tinted walls, and on the most beautiful thing in the room—the woman, turning her head half over her shoulder towards the opening door.

She looked like a dream—a living poem. A hundred similes with all the beautiful things of earth sprang to the man's mind. She wanted no adornments, no aids.

"For Marjorie?" he said, smiling; "she is a sort of sister. Besides, you need no embellishments."

"Oh, lover's twaddle!" said Alice archly. "I always look better in rich things; I love them, at any rate."

"Do as you please—yes, they suit you, but so does everything you wear. I thought you were ready—it is past seven."

"Is it? Dinner can wait, then," said she, easily.

"But Aunt Cathie can't, my dear. What a laggard you are—always behind time!" But his indulgent tone would not have mended the fault even in the most conscientious woman.

Alice was one of the slow, leisurely women who take their time over everything.

She laughed now; the dress she had worn in driving this afternoon was already removed, and a dinner dress lay on the couch.

"You are ready," she said; "if I am not, you can make my apologies. I am waiting for that stupid maid, who has gone to fetch something."

"Try and be ready, Alice. Begin dressing without your maid, there's a good girl," said Ericsen, laying his hand on the soft, rounded shoulder.

She looked up at him with her head on one side, her long lashes half lifted, so that the dark eyes looked in the shadow like velvet.

Ericsen, with quickened pulse, drew her towards him.

There had been a little difference between them about this coming home. Alice had wished to remain abroad; Graham thought two months' inaction sufficient, and her health was restored, so he had not yielded; and she had to some extent resented his insistence.

But now she seemed reconciled, and pleased with the charming house Catherine Fairfax and Morjorie had arranged for them.

And so there were in his heart emotions not called up entirely by the present moment.

"You are happy now, dearest?" he said, in that caressing way he had.

"I'm always happy with you, Graham."

"I know" — his lips touched her cheek—"but I meant—about the home-coming——"

"Oh, I don't mind!"

"You haven't forgiven me, then?"

"Ah!" said Alice, with a little sigh; "we'll see what your pet Marjorie says. Poor me! Why do you ever want things I don't want?"

"I wouldn't oppose you by choice, Alice."

"You say so. But I thought I was to hurry, and here you are keeping me," she said, lifting the head she had for a minutes nestled against him. "You are always making love, Graham."

"How can I help it? And you told me once I could not weary you."

"You never do — never!" she said vehemently, and she clung to him again. The little wound she had given just now was healed.

He went down into the drawing-room and stood by the glowing fire, waiting for her.

The Fairfaxes must have been late, for Alice never hurried herself for anybody, and yet she as in the room three minutes before they came.

She had not much choice of dress, for she was in slight mourning, but dark colors suited her, and she looked exquisitely fair.

She had seen both Mrs. Fairfax and Marjorie the previous day, when they had made a brief call, this being only the second day of the Ericsen's return.

She was very gracious to the stately lady, Marjorie's mother, and cordial with the daughter.

Almost immediately dinner was announced, and they went downstairs to the dining-room; bright with light and flowers and silver.

"It is quite a bijou house," Alice said, as she took her place, "and Graham is so pleased with this room— he hates the dull, heavy style of dining-room."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fairfax, smiling. "I remember Graham's tastes of old, and as you didn't tell me yours. my dear, I had to go by his."

"That's quite right," said Alice.

She was in radiant spirits, whatever her displeasure at being obliged to come home.

And she looked so brilliant that a careless ob-

server might almost have passed by the pretty, slight girl on her left hand.

For Marjorie was not remarkably beautiful; but she had that gift that is sometimes more taking than beauty-interest.

She had not Alice's superb coloring; she was pale, but her skin was very clear, and as fine as satin.

Her delicate features were of the intellectual type, and the strength of mouth and chin might have been too obtrusive for a girl had they not been softened by a dreamy brow and the deepest of coffee-brown eyes.

Graham had always declared his cousin could have made her living in one of the artistic professions had she needed it, and this was true.

Perhaps there was some regret in the girl's heart that she had to lead an apparently purposeless life—at any rate, it was deprived of great ambitions.

The talk went brightly—save from Alice. She listened and smiled, and ate her dinner with well-bred enjoyment of the daintest dishes on the table.

And sometimes she covertly watched Marjorie, and when this happened, the dark eyes always strayed to her husband.

"I suppose Graham is perfectly happy now," she said, when dessert was on the table and the servants had gone.

"Because he is peeling my fruit in the most artistic fashion?" said Marjorie, laughing.

Graham looked up at his wife with a smile.

"Why?" he said.

"You should hear the way he goes on about you," said Alice, turning to Mrs Fairfax. "I believe he scarcely knew how to get through the day till you came."

"You see, I half brought him up," said Mrs. Fairfax, and Graham laughed. Only Marjorie lifted her eyes

to Alice's face with a curious, grave look.

That look came into the brown eyes more than once during the evening, which was passed in music and talk.

Marjorie was a fine player, and Ericsen had an exquisite voice. Alice declined to sing or play; she sat and looked lovely and praised Marjorie's playing.

"I was so glad to hear from Graham's letters," said Mrs. Fairfax, "that you were recovering from your nervous depression after that terrible shock."

"Did he say so? That's so like men — they believe what they want to believe," said Alice.

"Isn't it true, then, my dear?"

"Not quite. I was much better out there; the place was doing me an immense amount of good, and the freedom from worry."

"What have you to worry about here?" said Mrs. Fairfax kindly. "You have only to look forward to still greater happiness," laying her hand on Alice's with motherly tenderness.

The girl did not respond; her eyes went across to where Ericsen stood by Marjorie at the piano.

"Is it such a great happiness?" she said, in a rather puzzled way. "Graham is glad——"

"So will you be," said Mrs. Fairfax.

"I suppose so. But now Graham has insisted on coming home, I shall have no peace—it will be nothing but this utterly useless search, continually harassing me. I can't bear a reminder even—and spending more money than we can afford."

"Graham could not very well sit with his hands before him. Arthur Ericsen was a father to him, much more to him, indeed, than even I have been. You need not hear much about it—he will keep it from you."

"But can he?" said Alice discontentedly. "It will

be in the air I breathe. Besides, I must take an interest in all he does."

"Of course; but where it is bad for you, he would not wish you to try and please him."

"What is Alice complaining about?" said Ericsen, coming up, and Marjorie took a chair near and turned some photographs over.

"Your hard-heartedness," said Alice.

"Mine? What about?"

"Aunt Cathie agrees — don't you?" turning to Mrs. Fairfax.

"My dear child! I never said so!"

"But you do, I know," insisted Alice in a charming way.

"What has poor Graham done?" said Marjorie.

"'Poor' Graham! Poor me, rather! Marjorie is a women all over — always take the man's side," said Alice playfully.

"He might be poor if he had offended you," answered Marjorie readily.

"I'm one against three, remember," said Ericsen, "and you always fought fair, Marjorie, in the old days. My hands are tied, too. What's the indictment, Alice?"

"I was telling Aunt Cathie how well I was abroad, and how I dread all this horrible inquiry you are so bent on now."

"Well, I shall not trouble you with it," he said gently.

"Just what I told her," said Mrs. Fairfax.

"I know you'll do your best"—Alice looked up to her husband as he leaned over her chair — "but you would be miserable if I kept myself outside your interests What does Marjorie say?"

Ericsen, playing with his wife's dark hair, looked round to his young cousin, who said quietly—

"I think Graham is right."

"Ah, but you always did support him in everything, didn't you?" said Alice with a smile.

"Indeed, no," said Ericsen, before Marjorie could answer. "I got many a sharp pulling up when my lady didn't approve of me."

"Who is heartless now, then?" asked Alice.

"Heartless! Why?" said Marjorie. "Do you mean because I found fault with him?"

"I thought you and he were such fast friends."

"So we were—and are," said Ericsen, "and Marjorie proved her friendship by calling me to account. That's the real sort of friend."

"The real sort, as you call it," said Mrs. Fairfax's gentle voice, "that sees flaws but is merciful to them, and the love remains changeless."

Alice turned her large eyes from one to the other of the three around her.

Ericsen, half behind her, did not altogether see the look, and Mrs. Fairfax did not understand it; only Marjorie caught something of what lay in those dark depths—the puzzle, the faint contempt.

She turned the conversation, and before long Mrs. Fairfax made a move to go.

Neither mother nor daughter said much on the drive home, beyond remarking that the evening had been pleasant, which showed there were some conflicting thoughts in their minds.

Marjorie followed her mother to the latter's room, and stood by the fire thoughtfully, her mantle half falling from her shoulders.

"Come, Marjorie," said Mrs. Fairfax; "how fond you are of a fireside dawdle. It is late."

"Yes, mother." But she did not stir. "So you enjoyed the evening?"

"Very much. Alice seems more inclined to be friendly than I thought she would."

"She hasn't much to say."

"My child, you think a little too much of intellect. When you are older you will see it isn't everything."

"I think a wife ought to be able to be her husband's companion," said Marjorie, "and—I don't know —Graham is in a glamor now."

"Don't you like Alice?" said Mrs. Fairfax, looking at her in alarm. She had profound faith in Marjorie's acumen, and still more in her instincts. "She is very, very fond of our boy."

"Yes," said the girl—a "yes" that said much.

Then she roused herself, kissed her mother, and went to her room.

"Do I like Alice?" she said to herself. "I don't think I do!"

Chapter 314

A NEW CLAIMANT

GRAHAM ERICSEN was a man of many true friends. His uncle, in his long and successful career at the bar, had formed a large connection, and his nephew, practically a son of his house, shared in the advantages, and added friends of his own as he grew into manhood.

The Ericsens were always favorites; a singular charm of manner and power of sympathy seemed a family inheritance, and attracted people of all sorts and temperaments.

Neither Graham nor his wife went as yet into general society, but there was visiting amongst the closer intimates—friends dropping in of an evening, or a few invited to dinner.

Alice did not altogether agree with keeping this seclusion; she told Marjorie that Graham had old-fashioned notions in such matters.

Marjorie answered—"I don't suppose in any case he would feel in cue for ordinary society."

"Oh, people don't grieve forever, nowadays," said Alice, rather taking the other girl aback.

Mr. Ericsen's death, too, had been peculiarly sudden and horrible. So at first, through the earlier summer months, the rush of the season surged round the bijou house without entering its walls.

Marjorie found this sort of informal, every-day visiting very pleasant.

It was made up of a good circle—people of intellect and acquirements, artistic or learned; women of cul-

ture and bright girls like herself.

Then Alice added friends of her own — not such interesting people as Graham's friends, but forming an agreeable element, yet who somehow seemed after a time to lose their distinction as Alice's associates and to become attached to the Ericsen side.

Marjorie watched curiously this odd and invariable sorting; she fancied that Alice noticed it, too.

For, though not intellectual or highly cultured, Alice was in many ways a clever woman and decidedly shrewd. She occupied in the circle a position of passive center—not the moving spring, Graham was that.

She sat, as it were, in state, to receive homage and look like an angel.

Marjorie sometimes likened her to the visionaries who are supposed to sit in silent majesty amongst the Himalayas, looking down on the world of men, but taking no part in their lives.

With one exception, which Marjorie soon discovered—Graham himself. Wherever they were alone or in company, Alice seemed absorbed in him.

Let him come near her or speak to her, she was all smiles and vivid beauty; if others were around her, she listened to them with languid interest—her eyes as her heart followed him.

Those eyes, however, would grow watchful if he were long at a woman's side.

Marjorie wondered if Graham noticed all this, or if he were too much under the spell. He liked, as most men, to be thought for and petted, and he was demonstrative himself—but not before other people.

Alice was restless if he were long away from her. Marjorie never forgot one afternoon when she called, and Graham failed to put in an appearance when tea came up.

"I hate clubs!" said Alice. "Please pour out the tea, Marjorie."

She was lying on the sofa, she was certainly not very strong, just now. Marjorie good-naturedly obeyed. Alice always did press everyone into her service, she thought. She asked, "Why?" as she handed her her cup.

"It takes them away so much," Alice answered.

"I don't think it's good for either man or woman to be always tied to home. And a man especially wants outside interests."

"I've heard people say that before, but I can't see it myself."

"No? Finding pleasures outside home makes home happiness more precious. It always seems to me a great mistake to cut a man off from his own pursuits and associates when he marries."

"He shouldn't have any—he doesn't need them," said Alice, with a flash of her dark eyes. "Love wants but one object—one interest."

"I think the more one loves, the more pre-eminent is the one love," said Marjorie, rather low.

"Oh, how cold that is! But you are so cold!" said Alice.

Marjorie smiled, not at all hurt. Her mother and Graham knew her better than that, she thought.

She was not going to deny—she was just as well pleased to remain shut up to Alice. But what would Graham say to this exclusive love—this continual claim of possession?

"Isn't it sometimes a matter of difference of nature?" she said, after this silent questioning.

"What do you mean?"

"Why that some people—Graham is one of them are fond of a great many, but love only a few."

"Then the love is divided—there must be less for the few."

"Oh, no, not with some natures," said Marjorie, not mindful to say what was in her heart. "Not with large-hearted natures."

"You are too philosophical for me," said Alice, "or for your age, I should say. I only know I don't understand a divided love—I don't call it love. But I suppose I live on love—I need it; you don't."

"It's a difference of nature," said Marjorie, carelessly, "as I remarked before." She was in reality a little vexed.

What did Alice know about her, setting her down in that stupid, supercilious fashion? "At any rate, I don't believe in shutting men off from all their interests. I believe in sharing them."

"What an odd girl you are!" said Alice, smiling. "Is that tea hot?"

"Yes—very nice. It will do for Graham if he comes soon, and if he doesn't he can put up with it," said Marjorie, laughing mischievously.

"No, indeed!" said Alice, taking her seriously. "I wish you'd ring, and they can make fresh tea."

And as Marjorie rose leisurely, thinking she had danced attendance enough on her lazy hostess, Alice half started up.

"There he is!" she said, with a pouting lip, and sparkling eyes.

Marjorie wondered what sort of a reception the delinquent would get, and, if this sort of thing happened often, how he would like it—and then he came in.

Marjorie drew back. She did not want her cousin to greet her first. She was conscious of a feeling of dread, of wanting to avert something.

Continued in next number

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